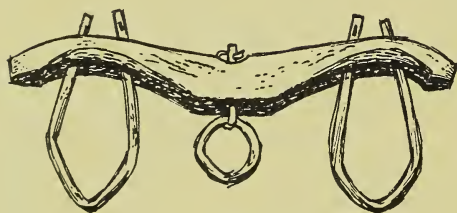


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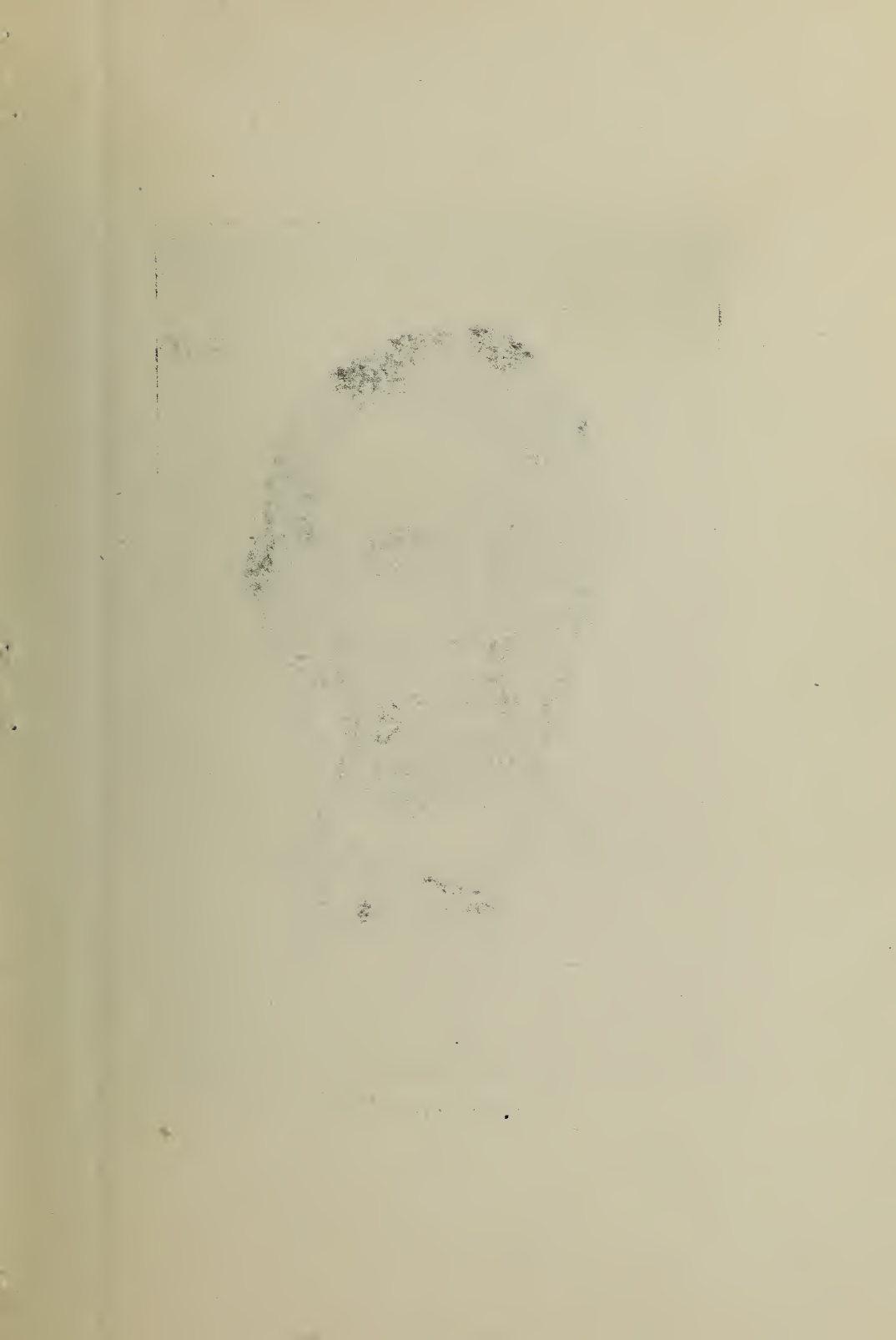
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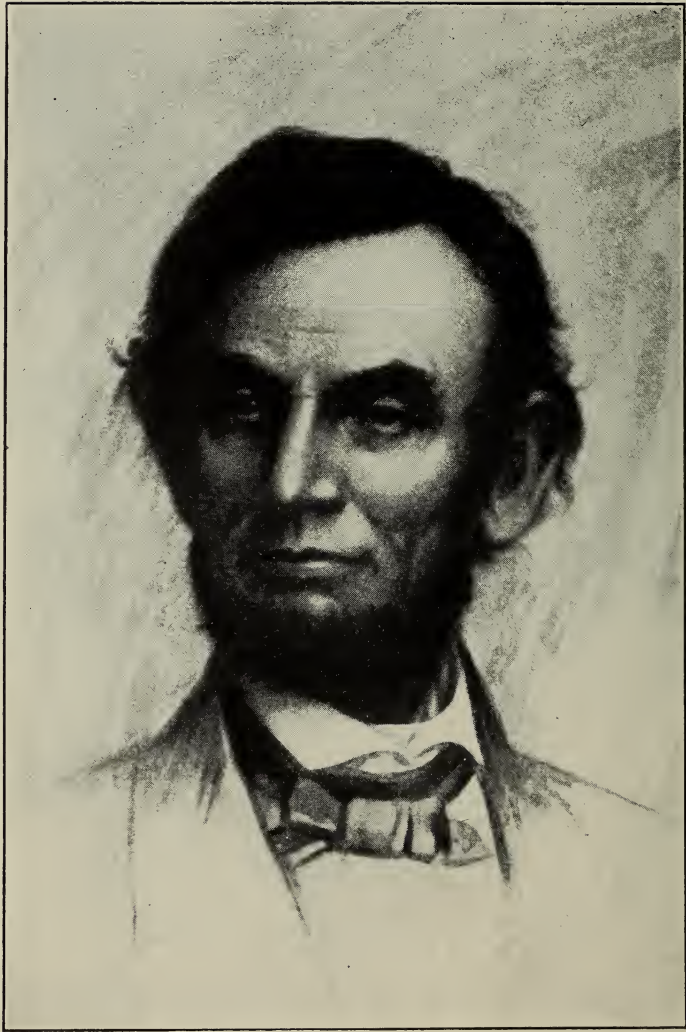
THE GUIDE TO SUCCEEDING PRESIDENTS

By

EMANUEL HERTZ

Delivered over WOR, February 11, 1928





ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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THE GUIDE TO SUCCEEDING PRESIDENTS

By EMANUEL HERTZ

THE ambition of those who lead in every walk of life during the ages has been so to rule, think, write, compose, paint, preach—and so through the entire gamut of man's activity—that those who come after them should be guided by what they have done—what they had set up for those who would follow. Of all the myriads who have thus gone the way of all human beings, who appear and disappear, how many stand out and apart among great writers, among men of achievement, founders of States, the conquerors, who can say, if they need say it at all: "Follow me." Those few elect who are followed need not beckon—the very fact that they have seen part of and been part of the elemental, the eternal, is sufficient to ensure their immortality. How many are there among the rulers of the world, in recorded history, who are thus implicitly followed? No one name springs to our lips, whom we could commend in ancient or medieval history—with the possible exception of Alfred the Great—but he has become so mythical, so indistinct a figure as to be but a poor example to set up. Rather must we turn to the other example—Machiavelli—who stands out a sample of the selfish prince, and we must unhesitatingly state that he must not be followed. Every other name must, if to act as a model, be qualified, some act or deed stands in the way of a claim for immortality. But when we reach the 19th century, we do find what we miss in other centuries and in all other lands. We find one name which we may without any hesitation class with the few great names which come down to us through the millennia. Hammurabi, that indistinct legis-

lator of hoary antiquity, Moses in Egypt and in the Desert, who studied him, Socrates of Athens, Alfred of Anglo-Saxon England, William of Orange and Abraham Lincoln—the last has certainly accomplished what most of the others have done in part only. He has even become the guide of our perplexed presidents. Every succeeding President, regardless of party, regardless of the school of politics which claimed him, had but one rule in his official life. “What would Lincoln do in my place”—“How would Lincoln act”—“How would Lincoln settle this or that great problem?” Nay, more. Every one of them from the fitful and futile administration of Johnson to the superbly balanced official career of Coolidge, have gone to Lincoln’s works, to his recorded State papers, to his marvelous epistles and letters, some of them even now appearing from their hiding places and sought advice, consolation, help and justification for what they advised, for what they counselled, and for what they sought to enact into law. Each one claimed or hoped to be the logical successor of Lincoln, each one but continuing the tasks which he, the great War President, had laid down. Like some great architect who plans and prepares a great world city to be completed and finished by those who follow—so did these succeeding Presidents find the plans of Lincoln’s Union indellibly traced for them in the government and in the conduct of these United States. The greater the President, the greater his insight into Lincoln. The more he would seek to better his people, the nearer he came to the great rail-splitter whose great heart beat for all. From Johnson to Coolidge, every President has seen himself walking in the footsteps of his great predecessor, overshadowed in the penumbra of that receding star of the first magnitude. Johnson knew him as an associate; he was one of his war governors, his second Vice-President. And this is what Johnson sorrowfully spoke of his dead leader: “In the midst of the American people, when every citizen is taught to obey the law and observe the rules of Christian conduct, our Chief Magistrate, the beloved

of all hearts, has been assassinated; * * * a great and good man, honored and revered, the beloved and the hope of the people, * * *. When future generations shall read the history of the second revolutionary crisis in which our Republic is now redeemed and regenerated from the curse of slavery, Abraham Lincoln will stand out the greatest man of the age."

Grant respected and revered the only man who divined his military plans, the man who plucked him from obscurity and made him Commander-in-Chief.

And this is what he has to say about him:

"Amid obloquy, personal abuse, and hate undisguised, and which was given vent to without restraint through the press, upon the stump, and in private circles, he remained the same staunch, unyielding servant of the people, never exhibiting a revengeful feeling toward his traducers, but he rather pitied them and hoped, for their own sake, and the good name of their posterity, that they might desist. * * * With all his disappointments **from failures on the part of those who had gained his confidence but to betray it, I never heard him utter a complaint, nor cast a censure for bad conduct or bad faith.** It was his nature to find excuses for his adversaries."

Hayes, the noble, humble, religious warrior—the plain soldier risen to the rank General, Governor and President, designated by someone as the best prepared and best trained man for the Presidential office, revered his military chief and expressed in noble and eloquent periods how deeply the words of Lincoln sank into his religious soul.

"As to Mr. Lincoln's name and fame and memory," says President Hayes, "all is safe. His firmness, moderation, goodness of heart; his quaint humor, his perfect honesty and directness of purpose, his logic, his modesty, his sound judgment, and great wisdom; the contrast between his obscure beginnings and the greatness of his subsequent position and achievements; his tragic death, giving him almost the crown of martyrdom, elevate

him to a place in history second to none other in ancient or modern times. His success in his great office, his hold upon the confidence and affections of his countrymen, we shall all say are only second to Washington's; we shall probably feel and think that they are not second even to his. (A year later Mr. Hayes wrote.) The truth is, if it were not sacrilege, I should say Lincoln is overshadowing Washington. Washington is formal, statue-like—a figure for exhibition. But both were necessary to complete our history. Neither could have done the other's work."

No more eloquent expression to what Lincoln was and is, is to be found anywhere than in the words of Garfield—the second martyr—the second victim of the assassin. No more superb expression of the magnitude of our loss is to be found anywhere than in his scholarly utterances in the Halls of Congress, and there were men in both Houses of Congress in those days. "The President is dead, but the government in Washington lives,"—stilled the crowds, who were infuriated by the cowardly act of the assassin on the most dismal Good Friday in our history.

Says Garfield in attempting to epitomize that great career:

"Gifted with an insight and a foresight which the ancients would have called divination, he saw, in the midst of darkness and obscurity, the logic of events, and forecast the result. From the first, in his own quaint, original way, without ostentation or offense to his associates, he was pilot and commander of his administration. He was one of the few great rulers whose wisdom increased with his power, and whose spirit grew gentler and tenderer as his triumphs were multiplied."

And so we pass to another soldier,—President Arthur, who followed Lincoln in the field—and to the sturdy Cleveland who in many respects followed his predecessor—"All my life I have tried so hard to do right"—a real Lincoln utterance. And this is his high tribute to the country lawyer Lincoln:

“Lincoln, too, was a country lawyer; and he was called to save the nation. He never lost the impress of an early life closely surrounded by all the incidents of rural existence, and encompassed by the stern providences of God. He, too, loved the country; and He Who made the country gave him, in compensation an unstinted measure of inspiration for the most impressive and solemn public duty.

“The deeds of these two country lawyers need no special recital. They are written in the annals of a grateful nation, and challenge the admiration of mankind. And who shall say that the majestic forms of Webster and Lincoln, standing forth in the bright light of human achievement, do not teach the world how the nobility of American character is developed by American rural life?”

And then the soldier boy in the Civil War who reached the Presidency—McKinley—the first soldier to halt the rout at Winchester and help Phil. Sheridan pluck victory from defeat,—a nobler soul never lived. When he graced the great office to which he came—the first plain soldier to be raised on the shield of his comrades to the highest position in the land—he simply quotes and follows the great Commoner at all times; in almost every address of moment he quotes, he refers to, he follows Lincoln:

“Lincoln,” says McKinley, “had sublime faith in the people. He walked with and among them. He recognized the importance and power of an enlightened public sentiment and was guided by it. Even amid the vicissitudes of war, he concealed little from public review and inspection. In all he did, he invited, rather than evaded examination and criticism. He submitted his plans and purposes, as far as practicable, to public consideration with perfect frankness and sincerity. There was such homely simplicity in his character that it could not be hedged in by the pomp of place, nor the ceremonials of high official station. He was so accessible to the public that he seemed to take the whole people into his confidence. Here per-

haps was the secret of his power. The people never lost their confidence in him, however much they added to his personal discomfort and trials. His patience was almost superhuman; and who will say that he was mistaken in his treatment of the thousands who thronged continually about him? More than once when reproached for permitting visitors to crowd upon him, he asked, in pained surprise: 'Why what harm does this confidence in men do me? I get only good and inspiration from it.'

And when he became the third martyr in the list of murdered Presidents—he is succeeded by the versatile and scholarly Roosevelt—whose heart was practically carved from that of his one ideal character in his tempestuous and active career. His the only portrait before him at his work—he could not mix with any other personality. "Where could I get a real portrait of Lincoln?" he writes to Prof. Norton. His Lincoln addresses are the very high water mark of Lincoln appreciation and Lincoln eulogy. Lincoln's soul echoes and re-echoes throughout the life and deeds of Theodore Roosevelt:

"* * * This rail-splitter," says President Roosevelt—"this boy who passed his ungainly youth in the dire poverty of the poorest of the frontier folk, whose rise was by weary and painful labor—lived to lead his people through the burning flames of a struggle from which the nation emerged, purified as by fire, born anew to a loftier life. After long years of iron effort, and of failure that came more often than victory, he at last rose to the leadership of the Republic at the moment when that leadership had become the stupendous world-task of the time. He grew to know greatness, but never ease. Success came to him, but never happiness, save that which springs from doing well a painful and a vital task. Power was his, but not pleasure. The furrows deepened on his brow, but his eyes were undimmed by either hate or fear. His gaunt shoulders were bowed, but his steel thews never faltered as he bore for a burden the destinies of his people. His great and tender

heart shrank from giving pain; and the task allotted him was to pour out like water the life blood of the young men, and to feel in his every fibre the sorrow of the women. Disaster saddened but never dismayed him. As the red years of war went by they found him ever doing his duty in the present, ever facing the future with fearless front—high of heart, and dauntless of soul. Unbroken by hatred, unshaken by scorn, he worked and suffered for the people. Triumph was his at the last; and barely had he tasted it before murder found him, and the kindly, patient, fearless eyes were closed forever.”

And when his great-hearted and big-brained successor came along, Lincoln had an additional appeal—the great jurist recognized the great lawyer in addition to the great President. President Taft certainly contributed his share of appreciation of Lincoln in his far-flung travels and multifarious experiences. In the Presidency and out of it—he ever was a keen student and an humble follower of the lawyer-statesman of Illinois. In his Springfield address President Taft says:

“Those traits in him which now place him with Washington, and with Washington alone, did not make themselves clearly manifest and were not fully developed until the trials of the four years of our awful Civil War. In that supreme test he threw off such dross as his early life may have shown, and the gold of his great character and intellect shone forth in its purity.” * * * Lincoln had to go down through the valley of the shadow of popular denunciation and popular distrust. * * * For months and years he had to strengthen himself with the thought that he alone understood the problems that he was working out: he alone had the necessary clearness of vision to see far beyond the present and secure the Nation’s salvation at the expense of popular misunderstanding and partisan attack. But fortunately, he lived through these trials, and his martyr’s death did not come until the people knew of his patience, his sacrifice, his great qualities of heart and mind, his patriotism, and his far-sighted statesmanship. And the

generations that have followed and will follow him, even those whose ancestors were in conflict with him, will give him a higher and higher place in the history of the world."

And then came the great stylist, the great scholar, who had transformed a local school—Witherspoon's and Madison's school—into a great national university, and transformed the governorship of New Jersey from a petty office into a great engine for wholesome legislation—he certainly found a leader in the great scion of the backwoods of Illinois. This is what he says:

"* * * When you read that name you are at once aware of something that distinguishes it from all the rest. There was in each of those other men some special gift, but not in Lincoln. You cannot pick Lincoln out for any special characteristic. He did not have any one of those peculiar gifts that the other men on this list possessed. He does not seem to belong in a list at all; he seems to stand unique and singular and complete in himself. The name makes the same impression upon the ear that the name of Shakespeare makes, because it is as if he contained a world within himself. And that is the thing which marks the singular stature and nature of this great—and, we would fain believe, typical—American. Because when you try to describe the character of Lincoln you seem to be trying to describe a great process of nature. Lincoln seems to have been of general human use and not of particular and limited human use. There was no point at which life touched him that he did not speak back to it instantly its meaning. There was no affair that touched him to which he did not give back life, as if he had communicated a spark of fire to kindle it. The man seemed to have, slumbering in him, powers which he did not exert of his own choice, but which woke the moment they were challenged, and for which no challenge was too great or comprehensive."

And again in "Mere Literature":

"Lincoln, nevertheless, rather than Jackson, was the supreme American of our history. In Clay, East and West were mixed

without being fused or harmonized: he seems like two men. In Jackson there was not even a mixture; he was all of a piece, and altogether unacceptable to some parts of the country,—a frontier statesman. But in Lincoln the elements were combined and harmonized. The most singular thing about the wonderful career of the man is the way in which he steadily grew into a national stature. He began an amorphous, unlicked cub, bred in the rudest of human lairs; but, as he grew, everything formed, informed, transformed him. The process was slow but unbroken. He was not fit to be President until he actually became President. He was fit then because, learning everything as he went, he had found out how much there was to learn, and had still an infinite capacity for learning. The quiet voices of sentiment and murmurs of resolution that went whispering through the land, his ear always caught, when others could hear nothing but their own words. He never ceased to be a common man: that was his source of strength. But he was a common man with genius, a genius for things American, for insight into the common thought, for mastery of the fundamental things of politics that inhere in human nature and cast hardly more than their shadows on constitutions; for the practical niceties of affairs; for judging men and assessing arguments. Jackson had no social imagination: no unfamiliar community made any impression on him. His whole fibre stiffened young, and nothing afterward could modify or even deeply affect it. But Lincoln was always a-making; he would have died unfinished if the terrible storms of the war had not stung him to learn in those four years what no other twenty could have taught him. And, as he stands there in his complete manhood, at the most perilous helm in Christendom, what a marvelous composite figure he is! The whole country is summed up in him: the rude Western strength, tempered with shrewdness and a broad and humane wit; the Eastern conservatism, regardful of law and devoted to fixed standards of duty. He even understood the South, as no other Northern man of his genera-

tion did. He respected, because he comprehended, though he could not hold, its view of the Constitution; he appreciated the inexorable compulsions of its past in respect of slavery; he would have secured it once more, and speedily if possible, in its right to self-government, when the fight was fought out. To the Eastern politicians he seemed like an accident; but to history he must seem like a providence."

I cannot help using one more extract:

"That brooding spirit had no familiars. I get the impression that it never spoke out in complete self-revelation, and that it could not reveal itself completely to anyone. It was a very lonely spirit that looked out from underneath those shaggy brows and comprehended men without fully communing with them, as if, in spite of all its genial efforts at comradeship, it dwelt apart, saw its visions of duty where no man looked on. There is a very holy and very terrible isolation for the conscience of every man who seeks to read the destiny in affairs for others as well as for himself, for a nation as well as for individuals. That privacy no man can intrude upon. That lonely search of the spirit for the right perhaps no man can assist. This strange child of the cabin kept company with invisible things, was born into no intimacy but that of its own silently assembling and deploying thoughts."

Among the great number of great orations delivered by Woodrow Wilson—and the number is remarkably great—none is finer than the two on Abraham Lincoln—and he unwittingly acknowledged the superiority of the rail-splitter's literary genius on the day when he attempted—fifty years later—to supplement at the Gettysburg Cemetery what Lincoln said and did there for eternity. The genial Harding could not help but fall in line, body and soul into the channel hewn by his great predecessor—and although he lacked the finesse, the great ideals of his immediate precursors, he paid full tribute, especially on two occasions, for what he owed to Abraham Lincoln:

"We are coming year by year," says Harding, "to a more truthful and understanding appraisal of him * * * We do know that as men contemplate this strange career and study its wonders and its lessons, they are at least planting in their minds and hearts a certain vague realization of what Lincoln was and meant; a consciousness of his personal significance to them; and with all this, a keen aspiration for some little participation in such a bestowal of selflessness, sacrifice and service as was the life of Lincoln. That aspiration, * * * is fixed in a greater number of human hearts today than it ever was before. It may be somewhat vague and unformed, yet we readily recognize that it represents something like the aspirations of a race for a new incarnation of the spirit and the leadership of Lincoln."

* * *

"Somehow my emotions incline me to speak simply as a reverent and grateful American, rather than one in official responsibility. I am thus inclined because the true measure of Lincoln is in its place today in the heart of American citizenship though nearly half a century has passed since his colossal service and his martyrdom. In every moment of peril, in every hour of discouragement, whenever the clouds gather there is the image of Lincoln to rivet our hopes and to renew our faith. Whenever there is a glow of triumph over national achievement there comes the reminder that but for Lincoln's heroic and unalterable faith in the Union these triumphs could not have been."

And finally, the keenest stylist of them all—the man of the short crisp sentence—of the chiselled paragraphs—the creator of winged phrase and nugget-like axioms—he certainly has pored long and often over the written word of that scholar of the Bible and of Bunyan, of Shakespeare and of Burns—could he help not to achieve such diction then, as is his? Says President Coolidge:

“Whenever men look upon his life, they are filled with new wonder. About him there was never any needless thing. No useless burdens held him back. No wilderness of tangled ideas bewildered his vision. For him the outward show of the world was cast aside that he might be a larger partaker of reality. His cradle was bare, but above it was the precious canopy of love of a gentle mother. When she was borne away in his early boyhood, he had learned the great lesson that all this world is mortal. From his youth he knew that anguish is the common lot of mankind. In his rearing there was no false art. Like the strengthening of his body, the strengthening of his mind came from great Nature.”

I had almost forgotten Benjamin Harrison, probably the greatest lawyer in the Presidency, how he discerned the greatness of Lincoln at a time when passions were far from being stilled, when a recrudescence of hatred in the South was manifest, when Dixie was momentarily in the saddle in the Federal government. But Harrison saw what Lincoln meant to humanity and said it in clearly formulated sentences of admiration and reverence.

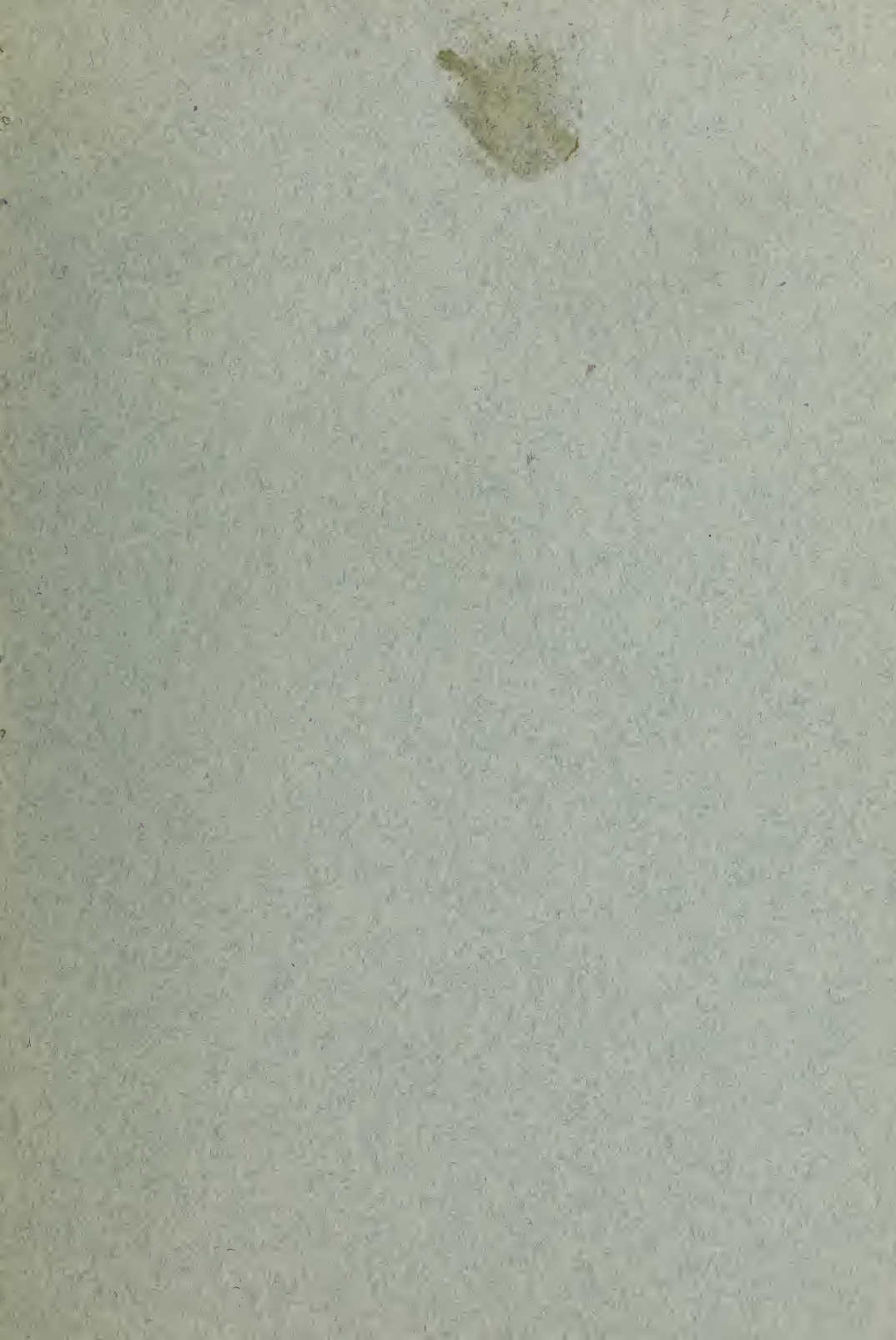
Benjamin Harrison thus epitomizes the work of the great War President:

“The Civil War called for a President who had faith in time, for his country as well as for himself; who could endure the impatience of others and bide his time. A man who could by a strong but restrained diplomatic correspondence hold off foreign intermeddlers and at the same time lay the same basis for the Geneva award, a man who could in all his public utterances, while maintaining the authority of the law and the just rights of the national government, breathe an undertone of yearning for the misguided and the rebellious; a man who could hold the war and the policy of the government to its original purpose—the restoration of the states without the destruction of slavery—until public sentiment was ready to sup-

port a proclamation of Emancipation; a man who could win and hold the love of the soldier and of the masses of the people; a man who could be just without pleasure in the severities of justice, who loved to forgive and pardon * * * Qualities of heart and mind combined to make a man who has won the love of mankind * * * He stands like a great lighthouse to show the way of duty to all his countrymen and to send afar a beam of courage to those who beat against the winds."

And so we have found a type of ruler who truly belongs to the ages—for so many reasons which have repeatedly been enumerated by statesman and poet, by journalist and by preacher, by jurist and by teacher—but for the additional great reason that he ruled with charity toward all and with malice toward none, and demonstrated that we were in a land where there were no enemies, but all were friends—cemented by his few elemental principles of government, that all men were equal, that all men to be equal must be free, and that when that was achieved a constitution must be cast in such frames of steel that government of the people and by the people must endure for all time.

Certain travellers of the 11th century relate, as Mazzini tells us, that they saw at Teneriffe, a prodigiously lofty tree which, from its immense extent of foliage, collected all the vapours of the atmosphere; to discharge them, when its branches were shaken, in a shower of pure, refreshing water. Lincoln is like this wonderful giant tree—an emblem of immortality—and the mission of this and succeeding ages should be to shake the branches, to study his legacy of inspiration as seen in his life, in his works, in his ideals, in his performances, in his strivings and in his achievements.



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